

Remarks at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan  
January 9, 2001

Thank you very much. Let me say, first of all, how delighted I am to be here, to be back at Michigan State. I thank President McPherson and the board of trustees for letting me come back. I think if I were to come back one more time as President, I've been here so many times I'd owe partial tuition at least. *[Laughter]* I always love coming here, and I'm delighted to be here.

I also want to thank Ed Foy for coming out to meet me in 1992 and sticking with me all the way to the end. He gave a great speech, and he was a great representative of the working people of Michigan and the United States, and I thank him. I want to thank Senator Carl Levin for being my friend and being a friend to the people of Michigan. There is no Member of the United States Senate today who is more respected than Carl Levin, and you should be very proud of him.

Now, your new Senator, Debbie Stabenow, got her start—she got her start in politics when she was still a student and was elected county commissioner. So some of the rest of you might get a few ideas from that. I am delighted to welcome her to the Senate. I'm so pleased she was elected before I left office. And she's in a class of Senators which includes some other women that I'm—*[applause]*—I told Debbie on the way in—she and Hillary and the other Senators who were elected in this last cycle were sworn in last Wednesday. And when our daughter, Chelsea, and I were just sitting up there like all the other families in the Senate gallery, being cautioned not to lean over and put our hands on the rail—*[laughter]*—I was trying to be on my best behavior. I didn't whistle, shout, or jump, but it was, for me, the happiest day of my life since the day my daughter was born. And so I'll always have a special feeling about this election.

I think that Debbie Stabenow showed a great deal of courage and character in this election, and she kept on going when a lot of people thought she couldn't win. And she'll do you proud there. I've watched her in Congress, and she'll be great.

I would like to thank so many other Members of the Michigan congressional delegation who

aren't here: Congressmen Levin and Conyers and Bonior, who lost his father in the last couple of days, and especially my good friend Congressman John Dingell, who's recuperating and is still up and around. All the other members of the delegation that helped me, I'm very grateful.

I thank Attorney General Jennifer Granholm for being here, and all the people from the Michigan Legislature who are here, but especially Representative Kilpatrick, who's been such a good friend of mine. Thank you. And Mayor Archer, thank you; Mayor Hollister, thank you.

And I want to say a special word of appreciation to a man who's been one of my closest allies and best friends in political life for way over a decade now, your former Governor, and a man who served as a great Ambassador to Canada in our administration, Jim Blanchard, and his wife, Janet. Thank you very much.

I'd also like to say that when word got out I was coming here, everybody in my administration wanted to come with me. I keep telling them, we promised to work until the last day in office. I've still got some environmental initiatives I want to take—I've still got some other things I want to do. But because I came today to talk about the economy, what happened over the last 8 years and where we're going, and the relationship of the economy to education, I brought two people who have been with me every day since I became President: the Secretary of Education, Dick Riley, and the Secretary of Labor, Alexis Herman. Give them a big hand, will you? *[Applause]* Thank you.

Believe it or not, there's one person in this audience with whom I served 24 years ago in my first elected position as attorney general of my State, your former Attorney General Frank Kelley. Thanks for being here, for 24 years of friendship. Thank you.

Now most of all, I want to thank Tom Izzo and the Michigan State Spartans for being up here with me. *[Applause]* Usually, the national championship team comes to Washington. But I'm sort of a short-termier, you know, and nothing beats recognizing the team before 14,000 cheering fans. Also, there's a lot of sense of humor and kidding in my family, and you may know that my daughter is a senior at Stanford.

So I'm going to wear that Spartan jersey tonight when I go home and see if I can provoke some conversation around the dinner table.

One of the things that I admire about this team—and I followed it very closely last year—is that there is no quit in it. I know you had a tough game last weekend, but let me tell you, if you play any game in life long enough, once in a while somebody will sink a three-point shot, falling backwards with your hand in their face. It will happen if you play any game long enough—the equivalent will happen to you. It is not fatal. The only thing that's fatal is quitting. And you've got no quit in that team back there, and that's good.

The most important thing I want to do today is to say a simple thank-you to the people of Michigan State, Lansing, and the State of Michigan for supporting me and Hillary and Al and Tipper Gore these last 8 years.

You know, my history with Michigan is profoundly important to the opportunity I have had to serve as President. It began with the primary victory here on Saint Patrick's Day in 1992. It included two general elections in which the people of Michigan were kind enough to give me their electoral votes. And thanks for making it three in a row last November.

I first visited this campus in 1992. I've come here for debates, rallies, and whistle-stop tours. I was the first President since Theodore Roosevelt to speak here while in office. I imagine I'm the only one to speak here twice. Let me tell you, every time I've come here, I've learned something. And even though 8 years is longer than it takes most of you to get a degree, my Michigan State education is just about complete.

When I came here—unbelievably, almost 9 years ago now—our economy was profoundly troubled and our society was divided. In 1992 there were riots in Los Angeles and troubling signs of social division elsewhere. I talked to college students in my home State of Arkansas who said they were dropping out of school because they couldn't afford to borrow any more money and they didn't believe they could get a good job when they got out and pay their loans back. I met college students in every State in the country, including Michigan, who were afraid they wouldn't get a job, even with their diploma.

I met union workers who thought they would either never work again, or if they did, they'd never in their lives get a job paying the same

amount that they were making before they lost their previous job. Industrial production had actually declined that year, for the first time in the history of the United States. Average family income fell by \$1,600 in just 2 years. The Federal deficit was \$290 billion and rising. The national debt had quadrupled over the previous 12 years. Interest rates were high. Growth was low. The confidence of the American people was shaken. And just as bad, it had been 13 years since the Spartans had won a national championship. [Laughter] It was not the best of times.

And I asked the American people to send me to Washington for a little while, on a mission—a mission to build a 21st century America with opportunity for all, responsibility from all citizens, and a community of all Americans. I committed to do my best to build a new kind of National Government, one that would focus on the future and on providing all of our citizens with the conditions and tools necessary to build their own lives and make the most of America's future.

Well, thanks to the good people of Michigan, and people like you across this country, Al Gore and I got the precious chance to spend 8 years in Washington, putting people first, getting the economy going again, improving social and environmental conditions, advancing peace, freedom, and prosperity around the world, and building a Government ready to make the most of this new century.

Now, I want to talk just a little about what happened, because it's important, when you look to the future, to know what happened in the recent past and how it brought us to this present.

We began with a clear strategy to get the economy going that it had three elements: Get the deficit down and get rid of it; invest more in our people; sell more American goods and services around the world. The American people did the rest. We are still experiencing the longest economic expansion in our history. Our economy is 50 percent bigger than it was 8 years ago. When I took office, the national unemployment rate was 7.3 percent, 7.4 here in Michigan. Now, it is 4 percent—it's been below 5 percent for 3 years—and it's 3.7 percent in Michigan.

We have—that's the lowest overall unemployment rate in 30 years, even though we've got more of our people participating in the work

force; the lowest female unemployment rate in 40 years; the lowest African-American and Hispanic unemployment rate ever recorded.

And unlike some of our previous recoveries, this rising tide is lifting all boats. In the last 3 years, people at all income levels have done better, and the highest percentage increase in income has come in the lowest 20 percent of the working population of America in the last 3 years. Poverty is at a 20-year low; homeownership at an all-time high. In 1992, Michigan State graduates who found jobs had an average starting salary of just under \$26,000. The average salary for last year's graduate was over \$36,000.

Now, how did this happen? Well, first, we said we would get rid of the deficits and begin to attack the debt. And keep in mind—let me just say this again—in the entire history of the country, going back to 1776, the debt of America quadrupled in the 12 years before we began to work. What's happened since? We started with a \$290 billion deficit. This year, we had a \$240 billion surplus. We've had the biggest back-to-back surpluses in history. By the end of this fiscal year, we will have paid down more than \$500 billion in our national debt. We're on track to be debt-free by the end of the decade, for the first time since 1835.

Why should you care whether your Government's out of debt? Here's why—two reasons. First, economically, if the Government is paying down its debt instead of borrowing money, that means there is more money left for you at lower interest rates for college loans, car loans, home loans, more money for business loans at lower interest rates—means more businesses more jobs, higher pay raises, and a higher stock market. The average American homeowner in America is now saving \$2,000 a year in lower home mortgages because we're paying down the debt instead of running it up. It makes a huge difference to your future which way we're going.

The second reason, very important to Michigan State where you've got a lot of people who depend on student aid, where you compete for research funds from the Federal Government, we spend over 11 cents on the dollar—nearly 12, and it was headed to 15 when I took office—we spend almost 12 cents on the dollar of every tax dollar you pay to the Federal Government in interest on the debt. It is the third-biggest item in the Federal budget, behind Social Security and defense.

If we get rid of that 12 percent—12 percent on the Federal debt is a huge amount of money in the Federal budget—that's 12 cents on the tax dollar we can either give back to you in tax cuts or invest in our common future, in education, in health care, in the environment, in national defense, in biomedical research, in building a better future.

So the first thing we said we'd do is do something about the deficit, and we did. And America should keep going until we're debt-free.

The second thing we said we would do is to increase investment in the American people. Now, that's pretty hard when you're cutting spending. We had to get rid of hundreds of Government programs. We reduced the Federal work force by 300,000, to its smallest size since 1960 when Dwight Eisenhower was President. But we have, with the passing of this budget, more than doubled our investment in education and training in the last 8 years. And I'm very proud of that.

We've had the biggest increase in Head Start in history. We've helped Michigan hire more than 1,300 teachers to have smaller classes in the early grades of school. We'll have 1.6 million children in after-school programs this year. We'll have 3.3 million children in the Children's Health Insurance Program, leading to the first decline in the number of people without health insurance in a dozen years.

We'll have 13 million Americans taking advantage of the college tuition tax credits, the HOPE scholarship and the lifetime learning tax credits, expanded Pell grants and work-study programs for helping millions more, including—listen to this—more than 115,000 in Michigan, including some of you in this audience today.

I also want to thank Secretary Riley for something else, the direct student loan program. Michigan State was one of the earliest participants in the direct student loan program. It helps students get college loans more quickly, more cheaply, and gives them more options for paying it back as a percentage of their income. Since 1993, college students have saved \$8 billion on their college loans because of the direct loan program, and college and universities have saved \$5 billion.

We said that we believed an administration could be pro-business and pro-worker, and we've tried to do that. In the last 8 years, we defeated attempts to repeal prevailing wage laws, to bring back company unions, to weaken

occupational safety standards. We cracked down on sweat shops, protected pension funds, passed tough new worker safety rules against repetitive stress injuries, and raised the minimum wage. And every time we did that, somebody said, "This is really bad for business." Every year, for the last 8 years, the United States has set a record for new small business formations. And we have more jobs in this 8-year period than ever before in history.

We said we believed that the modern economy must be pro-work and pro-family. And that's something a lot of the students here probably haven't thought of very much. But I can tell you, one of the things that I hear all the time, and I used to hear it even more, from people at all income levels, including quite high income levels, is that they are desperately afraid that they cannot meet their responsibilities at work and their responsibilities at home. I hardly know anybody with young kids who doesn't have at least one or two searing examples every year, where they're worried about whether they've neglected their work or neglected their kids.

Now, bringing up children is the most important work of any society, in any time, by far. If we have to make a choice between work and family, our economic objectives are defeated before we start. I can tell you, I've reached the age now when I can tell you from personal experience, knowing hundreds of people my age, if your kids—if life doesn't work out for them, it doesn't make a rip how much money you have. It doesn't matter how well you've done in business. Nothing else matters.

So this is very, very important. What do we do about it? That's why we gave a tax cut, even when we were reducing the deficit, to 15 million working families at the lowest levels of income, so anybody that worked 40 hours a week could use the tax system to get out of poverty, not be driven into it. That's why we raised the minimum wage. That's why we passed the family and medical leave law, which 25 million Americans have been able to use to take some time off when there was a sick child or a sick parent or a baby was born, without losing their job. It's been good for the American economy.

Now, we said we would cut crime, and we did. We put over 100,000 police on the street, working toward 150,000. We banned assault weapons. The Brady law background checks have kept 600,000 felons, fugitives, and stalkers

from getting guns. Crime is at a 25-year low, violent crime in Michigan down 21 percent.

And I know it was controversial here in Michigan, but I want to say again—I'm on the way out, and I'm not running for anything, but let me tell you something. I have in my closet an honorary jacket with a lifetime membership from the NRA which I got from working with them—listen to this—when I was Governor of Arkansas, on hunter education programs and trying to resolve disputes between retired people who retired into unincorporated areas and hunters. I did a lot of work with them.

But I think this business of trying to convince the voters of any State in our Nation that somebody who wants to keep guns away from criminals and kids is threatening their right to hunt or their right to engage in sport shooting—it's just not so. Nobody—it's not so. And I'm telling you something: It's not so. Now, you cannot—there is not a single law-abiding hunter in the State of Michigan who missed a day in the woods because of these initiatives we've taken, nor a single sport shooter that missed a single contest. But there's a lot of people alive today because those 600,000 felons, fugitives, and stalkers could not get their handguns.

We believed—and it was somewhat controversial even in Michigan when I said this—that we not only could but we had to grow the economy and improve the environment. We believed we could break the iron link between putting more greenhouse gases into the air and increasing the world's temperature and growing the economy. We believed that new sources of energy and new means of energy conservation could provide a whole new future, not just for the United States but for the rest of the world.

Now, what have we done? The air is cleaner. The water is cleaner. We cleaned up 42 toxic waste dumps in Michigan alone, 5 times as many as the 2 previous administrations, in 12 years. We're investing your money in research in clean technology to make homes, cars, and offices more efficient, to create thousands of new high-tech jobs.

Just last Friday, Ford unveiled an SUV that gets the equivalent of 40 miles per gallon of gas. And at the Detroit auto show right now—right now—GM is showing a family sedan that uses electric hybrid technology—that is, electricity plus fuel—to get the equivalent of 80 miles a gallon. These kinds of vehicles will be rolling off the assembly line soon. I am proud

we supported their development through the Partnership for the Next Generation of Vehicles that we established with the UAW and the auto-makers back in '93 that the Vice President oversaw for us for 8 years.

But it's going to get better. We are also funding research at the Department of Agriculture into biofuel, which most of you know as ethanol. But you can make fuel out of anything. You can make them out of grasses, out of rice hulls, out of any kind of waste product from farms. The real problems with it is, today, it takes 7 gallons of gasoline to make 8 gallons of biofuel. But we are doing research to try to crack the chemical mystery that is the equivalent of how we made gasoline from unrefined petroleum, from oil. And when we do—and they're getting very close—you will be able to make 8 gallons of biofuel with 1 gallon of gasoline, which means everybody will be able to get the equivalent of 500 miles to the gallon of gasoline. And this environmental issue will be much less formidable than it is today. And we will guarantee the future of the auto industry in Michigan by doing what is right for the environment, not pretending there is no challenge. That's what we've got to do.

Now, let me say to all of you, I love all these statistics; it's just nice to have a good story to tell. [Laughter] But this is about more than the statistics. It's about more than money. I think there is a new feeling in America of possibility, that we are prepared for the 21st century, that we can meet the big challenges that are still out there, that we can seize the opportunities that are still out there. And I hope one reason is that we understand that we need each other more and we have to work together more.

One of the things that really bothered me when I ran for President in 1992 is how much politics had become a matter of subtraction and division rather than addition and multiplication. What do I mean by that? Politicians always assume that they needed wedge issues to divide people, and then they wanted their supporters to be more inflamed and madder than the other people's supporters. And they hoped that the other people's supporters, if you could attack your opponent enough, would get disillusioned and wouldn't show up for votes. So they were trying to divide and subtract.

I always thought life worked better when you were trying to add and multiply, and I still be-

lieve that. I believe that one of the fundamental facts of the modern world is that we are growing more and more interdependent within our communities, our Nation, and beyond our borders. I believe that, therefore, successful social work, including economics, is becoming more and more like winning a national basketball championship. It's a team sport. I don't care how good a star you are; if the other four walk off the court, you're whipped. [Laughter] I don't care how good you are; five on one, the five win.

Now, we have to think about this more. I am immensely gratified that this generation of young people, I think, understands that better than they've gotten credit for. I've never understood all this Generation X talk and how young people are selfish and self-seeking. At Michigan State alone, 150 students have participated in AmeriCorps since we've had that program, out of 150,000 nationwide. We've had more young people do community service in AmeriCorps and earn some money to go on to college in 6 years than we had in the first 30 years of the Peace Corps. The young people of this country understand that they have to build a common future together. They understand that we have to find what's common about us across all the racial and religious and other lines that divide us.

And that's the last thought I want to leave with you. I've just given you a speech mostly about economics today and about the related progress we've made in other areas. But if somebody said to me, "You've got to just leave America with one wish," believe it or not, more than wanting us to be continually successful economically, I would say, "We have to be one America. We have to reach out across all these lines that divide us. We have to celebrate our differences." And I hope you will do that.

Now, one thing I will not claim is to have solved all the problems. You've got big problems out there, or challenges. You've got to deal with the aging of America. When the baby boomers like me retire, there's going to be a bunch of us. And you can't have Social Security and Medicare and the cost of our retirement bankrupt our children's ability to raise our grandchildren. We didn't finish that work, but we made it easier by putting 25 years on Medicare and putting—we're up to 54 years with Social Security now. We did a good job. If we save

the money that we're piling up on Social Security, we can save 54 years on Social Security.

So we didn't solve global warming, but we made a good dent in it. We haven't solved all the economic problems in the inner cities, the Indian reservations, the rural communities that have been left behind, but we left America with the tools to do it.

And what I want to ask all of you to do is to think about where we are now and where we were 8 years ago. And then, imagine in your own mind—do what I did 8 years ago, especially the young people—imagine where you would like America to be 10 years from now; where would you like Michigan to be 10 years from now? What do you think it would take to get you there? I can tell you that no matter what strategy you adopt, you will have to continue to invest in people, to put education first, to care about balancing work and family, to care about balancing business and labor, to care

about balancing the economy and the environment.

And if we think about the future with those sorts of basic values and never forgetting our mutual need for one another and that America wins when we treat every single endeavor like a team sport, the best days of this country are still ahead.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:40 p.m. in the Jack Breslin Student Events Center. In his remarks, he referred to Peter McPherson, president, Michigan State University; Ed Foy, assistant director, United Auto Workers Region I-C, who introduced the President; Michigan Attorney General Jennifer M. Granholm; State Representative Kwame M. Kilpatrick; Mayor Dennis W. Archer of Detroit; Mayor David C. Hollister of Lansing; and Tom Izzo, basketball coach, Michigan State Spartans. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

## Remarks at James Ward Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois January 9, 2001

Thank you very, very much. I want to say, first of all, I realize now that I'm in an elementary school that I should get a tardy slip today. [Laughter] But even in these closing days of my Presidency, I can't stop doing my job, and I was unavoidably detained. I'm sorry.

One thing I have learned in over 20 years of visiting schools is that you almost never have a good school without a great principal. And I want to thank Sharon Wilcher for her introduction and for her leadership.

I want to thank Secretary Riley, who has been my friend since the 1970's, and we go back a long way. Our families have been friends; we've shared the joys of our children and the stories of our respective governorships. And I knew he would be a good Secretary of Education, but I think after 8 years, the record will reflect that he is clearly the finest Secretary of Education this country ever had. And I'm very grateful to him.

I want to thank Secretary Alexis Herman, our Secretary of Labor, for joining us today. I brought the Deputy Attorney General, Eric

Holder, all the way from Washington. He had never been on one of these trips with me, and he's been working like a dog for years, so I asked him to come. To continue our school analogy, this is recess for him today.

I want to thank Senator Dick Durbin for his friendship and his leadership over all these years. Congressman Bobby Rush, who worked in my campaign for President in 1992, I'm proud of what you have done, sir. Thank you. Treasurer Dan Hynes; the president of the Chicago Teachers' Union, Tom Reese; Gery Chico; Paul Vallas.

And let me say a special word of thanks to your mayor for the partnership that we have enjoyed for education, for economic development and housing and so many other areas. I have constantly looked to Chicago for leadership. I tell people all the time, it's probably one of the best organized big cities in the entire world. And the work that has been done by all of you in education, in reviving the system here over the last 6 years, is exhibit A. Thank you, Mayor Daley.